

Public Comment
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Subject: NAC Differential Privacy Virtual Meeting Public Comment

The Partnership for America's Children is very concerned about the implications of differential privacy for the accuracy of data on children. We know that the Differential Privacy algorithm used for the 2020 Census redistricting data broke the connection between parents and their children in the data that was released. That resulted in about 160,000 census blocks where the data showed children (the population under age 18) but no adults (the population ages 18 and over). This is a highly implausible result.

The Census Bureau should communicate with data users about their plans to continue using this algorithm, or any other algorithms that also break the connection between children and adults in the household, for data files that include family structure and family type such as the Demographic and Housing Characteristics file, the Detailed-Demographic and Housing Characteristics file, and particularly data from the American Community Survey. The living arrangements of children are a key to measuring their well-being. For example, the most important single measure of child well-being is the measure of child poverty from the ACS, which must be calculated based on the household income. Census processes that distort the relationships between parents and their children result in inaccurate data on key measures used to understand the lives of America's children. Data users need to understand whether the data they are using maintain or break that relationship.